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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FEB. 10 MEETING WITH HEALTH MINISTER
JIMENEZ

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Summary and Action Request

1. (U) In the Ambassador's February 10 introductory call, Minister Jimenez outlined Spain's success in achieving universal health coverage, a comprehensive eHealth system, and progressive elder care. She noted that her Ministry was working on a U.S.-EU MOU on eHealth that she would discuss in her March 4 meeting with Secretary Sebelius. Separately, she was committed to winning legislative approval for a law to ban smoking in public places. At Ambassador's suggestion, she may raise with Secretary Sebelius the issue of reducing childhood obesity, and she is very interested in the First Lady's childhood anti-obesity campaign. Post is reaching out to the First Lady's staff to determine the possibility of a briefing on the campaign and/or a FLOTUS meeting for the Minister during her Washington visit. Post welcomes any input or assistance addressees can provide. End Summary and Action Request.

"Much to learn from each other"

2. (U) The Ambassador had an engaging and animated introductory call on Spanish Minister of Health and Social Policy Trinidad Jimenez on February 10. Minister Jimenez, a career politician with little background in health care, assumed the portfolio in April of 2009. She was quickly able to use her experience as the former Foreign Ministry Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs to reach out to Latin American counterparts in the context of last year's H1N1 epidemic. Her performance during the epidemic has received generally high marks.

3. (U) Minister Jimenez was accompanied by her Chief of Staff Jaume Segura, Director General for National Health Service Pablo Rivero, and Deputy Director for International Relations Carmen Castanon. The Ambassador was accompanied by econoff. The Ambassador opened by stressing his interest in health care and social policy issues. The Minister and the Ambassador agreed that the U.S. and Spain had "much to learn from each other" and "many possibilities to work together" in the area of health and social policies. The Minister added that she would meet with Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Sebelius on March 4 in Washington to discuss bilateral and U.S.-EU issues, as Spain currently holds the rotating EU presidency.

Spanish Successes: Health Care, eHealth, Elder Care

4. (U) Minister Jimenez said Spain's health care system provides excellent universal coverage and costs only six percent of the country's GDP. Still, she noted that the

current economic situation had generated a "small debate" over the cost. Minister Jimenez attributed some of Spain's health care success to a health information technology system that provides 97 percent of Spanish physicians with access to eHealth records and facilitated 150 million electronic prescriptions last year. She responded to the Ambassador's query on institutional barriers to eHealth by explaining that barriers were minimized by having all stakeholders -- including physicians, academics, and the information technology sector -- collaborate in developing the system. The Minister pointed out that such collaboration also bolstered the international market competitiveness of the private firms involved in Spain's eHealth system.

15. (U) The Ambassador noted that the U.S. is expanding eHealth and that the President's Strategy for American Innovation includes over USD 19 billion in investments to modernize eHealth. He suggested that the Ministry reach out to Dr. David Blumenthal, the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology at HHS. The Minister said she knew Dr. Blumenthal and that her Ministry had been working with his office on a U.S.-EU eHealth MOU that will be discussed at her meeting with Secretary Sebelius. She also invited the Ambassador to attend a conference of EU health ministers in mid-March to promote eHealth.

16. (U) Minister Jimenez called elder care policy, which comes under her Ministry, important for the "identity of the government." She said that with an average pension of USD 1,000 per month, many of the elderly had to be cared for by female relatives who had previously received no compensation. In response, the Ministry began a program three years ago to pay family care-givers for the elderly USD 500 per month: so far the system, which is still being expanded, has 200,000 participants. Minister Jimenez added that the Ministry also

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promoted programs encouraging an active elder life style by, for example, subsidizing travel for the elderly (her parents are taking advantage of the program to go to Bali). The Ambassador complimented Spanish innovations in elder care noting that it was a significant issue in the U.S. and in the U.S. health reform discussion.

Spanish Challenges: Anti-Smoking Law, Childhood Obesity

17. (SBU) Minister Jimenez said she was committed to getting a law passed that would strengthen Spain's existing anti-smoking legislation and outlaw smoking in indoor public places, such as restaurants and bars. She said her credibility was on the line if the law was not passed. She described it as almost impossible to find a smoke-free restaurant in Madrid, and bemoaned the risk second-hand smoke created for non-smokers, especially children. Although the relevant GOS bodies had largely agreed on the content of the legislation, the Minister said she wanted to wait until the right time -- likely in late summer -- to introduce the legislation. She said the tobacco industry was using restaurant and bar owners as surrogates to campaign against the idea by arguing that it would reduce the number of their patrons. The Ambassador noted that the same arguments were heard in the U.S., but in some cases, anti-smoking laws increased the number of restaurant and bar patrons. He said he supported her effort.

18. (U) Minister Jimenez said she may also raise the issue of reducing childhood obesity with Secretary Sebelius. The Minister noted that Spanish children have the second highest obesity rate in the EU. She said although the Spanish diet is generally healthy, children are less physically active and increasingly responsible for feeding themselves. The Ambassador mentioned a pilot program in the U.S. that had a significant impact by simply encouraging children to walk to school. The Minister said she had hoped to introduce a public campaign against childhood obesity, but budget constraints made it likely the campaign would have to wait

until next year. The Minister added that she was very interested in the just-announced campaign of First Lady Michelle Obama against childhood obesity. She was interested in the possibility of getting a briefing on the campaign and/or meeting the First Lady to discuss the issue while she is in Washington early next month. Post is reaching out to the First Lady's staff to determine the possibility of a briefing and/or a FLOTUS meeting for the Minister. Post welcomes any input or assistance addressees can provide.

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